12.13½ hrs.

[English]

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOOD, CIVIL SUPPLIES AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION

Seventh and Eighth Report

SHRI RAGHUNANDAN LAL BHATIA (Amritsar) : I beg to present the following Reports (English and Hindi versions) of the Standing Committee on Food, Civil Supplies and Public Distribution :-

(1) Seventh Report on the Action Taken by the Government on the Recommendations/Observations contained in the Fifteenth Report of the Committee on the subject of "Sugar".

(2) Eighth Report on the Action Taken by the Government on the Recommendations/Observations contained in the Seventeenth Report of the Committee on the subject of "Edible Oils."

12.14 hrs.

[English]

PETITION RE : DOWNGRADING OF PAY SCALE OF ENGINEERING EMPLOYEES OF AIR AND DOORDARSHAN

SHRI K.P. SINGH DEO (Dhenkanal) : I beg to present a petition signed by Shri P.N. Kohli, President, Association of Radio & Television Engineering Employees, Post Box 422, New Delhi and others regarding downgrading of Pay Scales of Engineering Employees of AIR and Doordarshan, as a result of recommendations of the Fifth Pay Commission.

12.14½ hrs.

[English]

STATEMENT BY PRIME MINISTER

RE: Ninth SAARC Summit, Male

THE PRIME MINISTER (SHRI I. K. GUJRAL) : I have the honour to present before the House a *Suo Motu* Statement on my participation in the 9th Summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation which was held in Male from May 12-14, 1997.

Cooperation amongst the 7 Member States of SAARC has been increasing in recent years and the Summit further exemplified the strength of the Association.

For the information of Hon. Members, I would like to summarise the principal development at the Summit :

An earlier decision of SAARC was to work for a South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) preferably by the year 2000 but in any case before 2005 AD. The 9th Summit has now agreed that SAFTA should be realised by the year 2001, thus advancing the final target year by four years. This is an important decision which reflects the growing sentiment among the Member countries to consolidate economic interaction speedily.

Another significant step was the decision to set up a Group of Eminent Persons in order to develop a long range vision for the SAARC. There was general agreement amongst the Heads that SAARC was now in a position to strengthen its activity in core economic sectors, for which an agenda should be developed.

The question of sub-regional cooperation in South Asia came up. Prior to the Summit, some differences of opinion had been expressed on the appropriate relationship between sub-regional cooperation and the regional structure of SAARC. Whereas our preference from the start was that projects for sub-regional cooperation should be developed within the SAARC, as specifically provided for under Article 7 of the Charter, some other countries had initially felt that it was better to keep sub-regional efforts outside the SAARC.

Happily, the issue was resolved of the complete satisfaction of all parties by agreeing that specific projects for sub-regional cooperation would be developed and processed through the Secretariat and endorsed inter-governmentally through established processes of SAARC prior to their implementation. This has made it possible for a number of useful projects involving some but not all of the members, including a quadrilateral initiative involving Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal based on a Nepalese proposal, to be developed in a manner that will enhance the flexibility and strengthen the functioning of the SAARC.

Particular emphasis was placed at the Summit on the problems faced by women and girl child in the society, particularly the girl children in especially difficult circumstances. It was decided that the decade 2000-2010 would be designated as the 'SAARC Decade for the Rights of the Child'. SAARC will also pay particular attention to the

evil of trafficking in women and children.

SAARC activities in the area of education will be expanded to cover Distance Education, and the facilities of Open University and Distance Education institutions will be expanded across the region with the possibility of the formation of a Consortium of Open Universities.

Important initiatives were taken in the field of environment, and included such aspects as developing common minimum standards for air and water pollution, trans-boundary bio-diversity conservation and evolving a SAARC Convention on Prevention of Illegal Trafficking in Flora and Fauna. SAARC Environment Ministers will henceforth meet annually in view of the importance of this area of cooperation.

The process of progressive relaxation of visa requirements for inter-SAARC travel continued and a number of new categories would henceforth be exempted. These include all Cabinet members of the SAARC countries, heads of the NGO apex bodies and a number of others.

In order to promote cooperation among the professional organisations and voluntary groups across the SAARC region, it was agreed to create a new category of 'SAARC recognised bodies', which will enable such groups to come together for coordinated action with the SAARC Secretariat playing a supportive and encouraging role. This decision will facilitate creating of new channels of region-wide cooperation and people to people contacts.

It was agreed that the third meeting of Finance and Planning Ministers, in the context of the SAARC mechanism overseeing the progress in poverty eradication of the region, will be held shortly. In the current year, specific attention would be paid on participation of the target groups in the formulation and implementation of poverty eradication programmes, and 1997 has been designed the "SAARC Year for Participatory Governance."

I wish to emphasise that the member States' approaches at the Summit were very positive and constructive, which augurs well for the future of SAARC. There is a strong desire among member States to enrich the work of SAARC and strengthen it every day.

In view of the growing climate of close cooperation, it was also decided that informal political consultations amongst the SAARC leaders would be useful.

One of the related positive features of the SAARC Summits is the opportunity it offers Heads of Sates or Governments, and Foreign Ministers to have exchanges towards strengthening bilateral relationship amongst themselves. I had meetings with all other Heads of State and Governments at the Summit in a most cordial spirit.

My meeting with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has attracted a great deal of attention. I was glad at the opportunity to meet him and to discuss our bilateral relations. This represents an initial step in our efforts to develop structured dialogue between our two countries, which has been unfortunately missing from the agenda for the last several years. We were able to agree that our Foreign Secretaries should meet once again in the near future, in order to work out all aspects on the basis of which the dialogue can go ahead. We also agreed on a number of other useful measures such as installation of a hotline, the release of fishermen held by the two sides and the need to ease travel restrictions. Both sides will take steps to curb hostile propaganda if any and statements that may strain bilateral relations.

My meeting with the Prime Minister of Nepal reaffirmed the close friendship between our two countries. It was agreed that I should visit Nepal at an early date, probably in the first few days of the coming month. Similarly my meeting with the Prime Minister of Bangladesh was most friendly. Relations between our two countries have developed extremely well and we have greatly strengthened our mutual cooperation. We reviewed the implementation of the landmark water sharing treaty which has been implemented successfully through the first dry season of its duration, despite an unanticipated water shortage in the river.

I greatly welcomed the opportunity by talk to His Majesty the King of Bhutan, who is a great friend to India. He chose to transit through New Delhi on his return home and I had a further opportunity of meeting him during his stop over.

Similarly, I greatly valued the opportunity of renewed contacts with Her Excellency the President of Sri Lanka. We were able to exchange views on a number of issues. We look forward to the next SAARC Summit which would be hosted by Sri Lanka next year, on the occasion of its 50th anniversary of Independence.

Finally I had a very friendly meeting with our host, His Excellency President Gayoom of Maldives. I was glad to have the opportunity of visiting Indian cooperation projects in Male, a hospital and training institute, which are both doing well.

[Shri I. K. Gujral]

This brief review will, I hope, bring home the fact that on the whole, we enjoy excellent relations with our neighbours in the region. Where problems persist, we have embarked on a process which, I am confident, will yield results in the future.

(Interruptions)

[Translation]

SHRI VIJAY GOEL (Sadar-Delhi) : Mr. Speaker, Sir, will the honourable Prime Minister give statement regarding Rent Control Act . . .*(Interruptions)*.

(Interruptions)

[English]

MR. SPEAKER : I will allow you. Why do you not have patience when I have repeatedly told you that I am going to give you a chance ? Will you not allow me to say something in favour of the Members ?

[Translation]

KUMARI UMA BHARATI (Khajuraho) : Mr. Speaker, Sir, the people in Orissa are dying of starvation . . .*(Interruptions)* If you would have taken this matter earlier, we would have got the Prime Minister's reply . . .*(Interruptions)*

[English]

Mr. Speaker : I have also received a request saying that those Members who had given notices under Rule 377 and did not get their chance because of the ballot, they should be allowed, today being the last day, to raise it. I have gone through this. We have a precedent that shows that this had been done in the past. Unfortunately, we have got 50 notices with us. I am going to impose one condition. Those who have already raised Matters Under Rule 377 during this week, will not be allowed to do so. I do not think that everybody will be present here. Those who want to raise Matters Under Rule 377 and given notice already but did not get a chance, may please send their names to the Table Office. Whosoever has given a notice, will get a chance.

[Translation]

KUMARI UMA BHARATI : Hon'ble Speaker, Sir, Since three-four years a population of 25 lakhs of four districts of Orissa-Bolangeer, Kalahandi, Dhankanal and Koraput have come close to the starvation. On One hand, they are suffering from natural calamity and on the other the negligence of the state Govt. and the indifferent attitude of the Central Government, consequently a large number of youth has left their homes leaving their aged parents alone. No arrangement of food has been made for them. A team of the Members of Parliament headed by Shri Krishan Lal Sharma, Convenor had gone to visit the Orissa. After that I had also gone to see the situation. You can't imagine that any living person can live in such a situation. When we go there, a crowd of people appearing to be skeletons, came and touched our feet because they fear they would die of starvation. Several requests have been made to the State Government. Our Ex-Prime Minister Shri Deve Gowda himself gave this assurance in the House that he would provide special assistance to Orissa. But he says that state Government is not utilising it. In view of the starvation in the state it seems that there is a need to provide some more assistance. Hon'ble Prime Minister is present in the house. I request him and I also request hon'ble leader Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayeeji to put the complete picture of the situation before the house. We want that the Prime Minister should not only give the assurance but also state the specific amount of assistance he will provide for Orissa. If the state Government is not utilising the full amount, will the Central Government give strict instructions to Orissa where people in the four districts of Orissa have reached to the doors of death due to starvation ?

When one of our delegation met the hon'ble Prime Minister, we had asked him that if the state Government pays no heed, he himself should visit the Orissa and see the plight of the people there. Lakhs of people, there are living a dead life. Our government should in no way be indifferent towards them, the foremost duty of the Prime Minister and the Central Government.

[English]

SHRI PINAKI MISRA (Puri) : When a reference has been made to the State Government, I would like to clarify. Just give me 30 seconds . . .*(Interruptions)*.

SHRI KRISHAN LAL SHARMA (Outer Delhi) : Sir, my notice is also there, on the same subject.

SHRI PINAKI MISRA : Sir, the BJP delegation had gone there. Why had the BJP delegation gone to Orissa after five years, we all know. We do not want to elaborate on that. The fact of the matter is that after five to six years . . .*(Interruptions)*.